



Reading Contemporary Art: Comparative Art History Education through Themes*

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Conducting contemporary art lessons with a traditional art history view and a chronological approach leads to misinterpretations - and even to prejudices - of contemporary art as it is not progressing chronologically, cannot be assessed within specific stylistic forms and defined with strict lines, unlike previous traditional art disciplines. Based upon this problem, in this study, a new course process was planned in which contemporary art pieces are compared to traditional pieces focusing on the five major themes contemporary art differs from traditional art.

Within the scope of this research dealing with this process, answers have been sought to the questions how comparative art history education through themes influences the perception of art, professional, personal, social progress of pre-service teachers and what sort of changes this method creates. **Methodology:** Research findings designed as action research were obtained by reviewing activity forms prepared for the lesson and semi-structured focus group interview. Gathered data were interpreted by the descriptive analysis method. **Findings:** The findings obtained in this study suggest that this method helps pre-service teachers define art with a broader perspective, better understand and embrace contemporary art, develop awareness about social issues conveyed through contemporary pieces, explore different expression possibilities for art practices and to form new opinions about art education in a professional sense. **Implications for Research and Practice:** Pre-service teachers expressed positive views for the comparison technique and providing an environment for expressing oneself freely. Within this context, it is suggested to design discussion-based art history lesson plans around specific themes.

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Introduction

The “Contemporary Art” course, which is part of the BA programs of preservice art education programs in Turkey, deals with the vast content of contemporary art approaches which usually do not move in a chronological order, cannot be categorized under specific styles and be defined with certainty. Conducting this course with the traditional art history education perspective and a chronological approach may cause various problems in conveying the merits of contemporary art. At times, such approaches may even lead to prejudice against it. In this respect, there is an urgent need for newer approaches toward teaching contemporary art to interpret and explain its complex content based on intellectual process rather than traditionally underlined concepts related to talent (Tekin, 2018, p. 92). Therefore, it is recommended to conduct research on which education approaches can be applied to contemporary art education (Coskun Onan, 2016, p. 285). Action research, which is one of the qualitative research methods, includes practices for studying and solving these complex types of problems in context with authentic actors. Thus, in this study, action research was preferred to co-construct an alternative learning environment for teaching contemporary art.

While designing some aspects of an alternative course for teaching contemporary art, the research in this study was based on certain modes of postmodernist views. The major characteristics of postmodern art are: combining art with life, abandoning elitism in art, rejecting traditional esthetic criteria and modern art (anti-art), fictional reality, joint use of various art works, and including various artistic activities (Yamaner, 2007, pp. 42-44). The perspective here is more about criticism than creating an esthetic product. As the focal point of the contents of contemporary art course, the era starting with the 1960s was selected. Assessment of post-1960s art works has become more dependent on theoretical knowledge and the expression ‘reading an artwork’ has started to be used frequently (Sahiner, 2008, p. 158). Therefore, the alternative learning process developed within the scope of this research is called ‘Reading Contemporary Art’ and is constructed with a postmodernist approach.

Postmodernism has compelled art education to transform just like it forced everything to change. Education, including contemporary art works, provides various competencies, such as creating awareness for cultural differences, inter-cultural tensions, and gender discrimination (Dawe-Lane, 2005, p. 97). Just like contemporary art, postmodern art education is interested in social matters and gives equal opportunities to different cultures. In short, the foundations of today’s postmodern art education are associated with visual culture studies, critical pedagogy, constructivism, critical theory, feminist theory, and multiculturalism/social justice (Ozsoy & Mamur, 2019, p. 153). Thus, different world views and perspectives should be considered when dealing with contemporary art works.

The contemporary art course deals with a chronological approach in the current curriculum, just like traditional art history courses. Critical contemporary art historians, however, claim that the chronological approach limits to observe and appreciate the influence of certain social structures, gender and cultural groups (Freedman, 2003, p. 47). A passive teaching model based on memorizing chronological

knowledge and brief explanations on topics dissociates contemporary art course from its goals (Gunes, 2015, p. 368), as the singular chronological approach contradicts the pluralist perspective of contemporary art. Aykut (2013, p. 711) suggests applying multiple inquiry method and open-ended approaches regarding this problem. Barrett (2015, p. 27) states that art cannot be linked to only one condition or a single group of conditions, that the best way to deal with controversial art pieces is to search for similarities between these pieces and objects we do consider as art. When teaching art history, a vivid learning environment that incorporates these kinds of comparisons based on similarities/contrasts instead of a chronological approach will keep the student more active and aware (Kırısoglu, 2002, p. 137). Thus, the course process was designed based on discussions and comparisons according to specific themes.

The method adopted in this research is parallel to principles constructivist approach defends. According to the constructivist approach, teachers create an embracing learning environment allowing students to actively participating in the content through social interaction instead of traditional teaching methods. A learning environment designed with a constructivist approach provides the necessary conditions “for the learners to observe multiple perspectives, to test or question their own meanings” (Yurdakul, 2005, p. 51). One method recommended in this approach is in-class discussions. The selected topic should not have an obvious correct answer but is suggested to be rather complicated and controversial (Schunk, 2014, p. 270). In-class discussion method was adopted in this study as it is one of the best methods to deal with contemporary art, which defies the single truth perspective. The starting point of the discussions was based on artwork comparison suggested by Barrett (2015) and Kırısoglu (2002). Accordingly, the teaching and learning processes were conducted based on the comparison of contemporary art works with artworks created with the traditional approach, considered as art work by art historians and well-known by teachers. In this process, for each week, certain themes were specified.

Learning through themes is a recommended approach today in art education, as art education is a field capable of supporting and directing an interdisciplinary-thematic program (Isler, 2004). According to Anderson and Milbrandt (2005), thematic inquiries should be made possible through art and visual culture for the students to help them understand both themselves and others” (Saribas, 2019, p. 153). While it is a method various disciplines can be used together, thematic learning can also be applied to a single discipline. This approach, also called as “connected education program” can be applied in contemporary art courses in which subjects within one discipline are handled in association with each other (Fogarty, 199; Erbek, 2016, p. 18). The themes selected to highlight the differences between traditionally created artworks and contemporary art works were specified as: place, material, process, subject-matter and technique. Consequently, this study, through action research, aims to develop an alternative learning environment based on these themes and comparative art history education and to reveal how this environment influences the art perception, vocational, individual/social improvement of pre-service teachers, and what sort of changes this environment creates. Since similar studies about the specific

learning environment this study sets out to create rarely exist, it will contribute to the field of art education, especially to teaching and learning contemporary art.

Method

Research Design

In this study, action research, which is a qualitative research technique allowing learning environments to be examined more comprehensively, was chosen because it is defined as “a research method handling the solutions applied by teachers to overcome the problems they encounter in their lessons with a more systematic perspective (Uzun, 2016, p. 20).” According to this, action research is a scientific research process involving individuals’ own practices based on providing change and improvement and bearing great potential, especially in developing in-class practices. Within this context, action research was selected as the most suitable method for the purpose of this study, which aims to reconstruct a portion of a contemporary art course, and evaluate and develop the impact of the designed learning environment.

Research Sample

When forming the study group for this research, the purposive sampling method was used, as it allows, unlike quantitative studies, to intensely work on conditions bearing rich knowledge (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Criterion sampling, one of purposive sampling strategies, was used when forming the group. The criteria for choosing the focus pre-service teachers were: their interest in the course, their participation in the lessons, self-expression skills and voluntary participation. Based on these criteria, a study group comprising five female and one male pre-service teachers attending the researcher’s contemporary art course was formed.

Research Instruments and Procedures

This research was conducted during the “SAN308 Contemporary Art” course at Anadolu University in the Department of Fine Arts Education. A 5-week period of the course, which focuses on post-1960s art, structured according to five themes and activities based on artwork comparisons, was designed. Data were obtained by written forms (activity forms, final evaluation forms) on the conducted activities and focus group interviews. For the 5-week research process, activity forms (AF-1, AF-2, AF-3, AF-5, AF-6) were designed in tune with the lesson content. In addition, at the end of each lesson, pre-service teachers were given final evaluation forms (FEF-1, FEF-2, FEF-3, FEF-4, FEF-5) regarding the assessment of the process.

Another data gathering tool was a focus group interview in this study. The reason to choose focus group interviews is that they provide richer data, as some issues that fail to come to mind during individual interviews may be reminded by other individuals in group interviews and be further elaborated on (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2011, p. 151). Semi-structured interview questions were prepared for the focus group interview. The interview form comprising six open-ended questions was reviewed by

two experts of the field and the final form of the questions was shaped. The 82-minute interview was conducted in a silent environment around a conference table.

Data Analysis

Gathered data in this research were examined with the descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis presents the reader with findings that are already organized and interpreted. According to this approach, “the obtained data are summarized and interpreted based on the pre-specified themes” (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2011, p. 224). A framework was designed for data analysis based on the conceptual body of this research and dimensions presented in the observations. Titles and related themes were determined considering this framework. The gathered data were organized and interpreted according to these themes.

Validity and Reliability

To increase the validity and reliability of this research, various data gathering methods, such as focus group interview and document analysis, were applied. The reliability of the transcription form was verified by watching the video recordings. To increase the reliability of the gathered data, another field expert coded them and the codes were crosschecked. During crosschecking, necessary alterations were made, and a consensus was reached. The data gathered from the focus group interview and the written forms about the activities were presented together. Direct quotations were referred to as well to increase the validity of this research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Process

The application process of this research with the specified themes involved a 5-week period. Each week's theme, the titles of the lessons and subjects, and the names of the activities performed in the lessons are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1*Weekly Plan of this Research*

Time	Theme	Lesson Title	Subject Titles	Activity Titles
1 st Week	Place	Staging place as a Way of Statement in Contemporary Art	Land Art, Ecological Art, Environmental Art, Urban Art, Public Art	Activity 1: Analyzing Space Activity 2: Exhibition Space
2 nd Week	Material	Change of Material in Contemporary Art: Limitlessness of Material'	Arte Povera-Body Art-Process Art	Activity 1: Does Material Alter the Meaning? Activity 2: Material and Intent
3 rd Week	Process	The Changing Role of Artist/Audience: Art as an Experience	Performance Art-Happenings -Fluxus	Activity 1: Art as an Experience/ Art as an Object Activity 2: Interdisciplinarity in Art
4 th Week	Subject	New Concepts New Problems in Contemporary Art	Feminist Art-Identity Politics and Art-New Conceptualism	Activity: Altering Problems of Art
5 th Week	Technique	The New Toy of Art: Technology	Video Art-Digital Art	Activity 1: Technology as an Artistic Expression Medium Activity 2: Reception of Technology and Art

In the first week of the course, students were shown the video of James Turrell's work *Skyscape, The Way of Color* (2009) in silent mode. Then, students were handed out an activity form (AF-1) prepared for comparing this work with Albrecht Durer's painting *The Large Piece of Turf* (1503) (Picture 1).

**Picture 1.** The visuals of works compared in the activity 'Analyzing Place'

In the second activity (Picture 2), a discussion was held regarding the comparison of Banksy's urban art piece *Yellow Line Flower* (2008) with Van Gogh's painting *Sunflowers* (1888). During the discussion, students were encouraged to comment on the museums' role in appraising art and the concept of place in art. The lesson ended with filling in the final evaluation form (FEF-1).



Picture 2. Visuals of works compared in the activity ‘Exhibition Space’

In the second week of the course, pre-service teachers watched a video on Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) and were handed out activity forms (AF-2) regarding the comparison of this work and Goya’s *Still Life with Golden Bream* (1808-1812) (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Works of Hirst (left) and Goya in the activity ‘Does Material Alter Meaning?’

In the second part of the activity, an activity form (AF-3) was applied regarding the comparison of Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God* (2007) and Philippe de Champaigne’s *Vanitas* (the 1600s). In the last activity, Hermann Nitsch’s (member of Viennese Actionists) performance called *48th Action* and Rembrandt’s oil painting *Slaughtered Ox* (the 1630s) and the limits/limitlessness of material were discussed with the whole class. The lesson was completed by filling in the final evaluation forms (FEF-2).

In the third week of the course, activity forms (AF-4) were handed out about comparing Tino Seghal’s work *The Unilever Series: These Associations*, which he performed in Tate Modern in 2012, with Christen Kobke’s *Outside the North Gate of the Citadel* (1834). The second activity (Picture 4) took up the last part of the lesson in which

the video of Jannis Kounellis's work *Da inventare sul posto* (*To invent on the spot*) was watched and discussed.



Picture 4. Jannis Kounellis's work in the activity 'Interdisciplinarity in Art'

In the fourth week of the course, an activity form (AF-5) was distributed to the students with questions about how these subjects were handled in the past and are handled now. In the form, the pre-service teachers were asked to explain their views on social gender roles with regards to the examples of Feminist Art and social issues with regards to the examples of Identity Politics and Art. They were also asked to comment about 'consumption society', the power of media in shaping the society based on the works of Barbara Kruger (Picture 5) and Jenny Holzer.



Picture 5. Examples of Barbara Kruger's works examined in the week of the lesson 'New Concepts New Problems in Contemporary Art'

In the fifth week of the course, Mark Wallinger's video *Threshold to the Kingdom* (2000) was watched. The video content, and the differences between video art and film genres, in which video serves as an intermediary, were discussed. It was also discussed what aspects in this work were included by technology in order for this video to gain artistic value. As part of the discussion, a text from Grant Pooke and Graham Whitham's (2013) book 'Understand Contemporary Art' about the video work was

read to the students and moving from this text, a discussion was held on comparing this video work and a religious painting with a similar subject. In the second part of the lesson, the video of the digital work by Luc Courchesne called *The Visitor: Living by Numbers* (2001) was watched and activity forms (AF-6) about analyzing technology use in art were distributed. The lesson concluded with filling in the final evaluation form (FEF-5).

Results

Findings obtained in this research are presented under three main themes. Figure 1 shows the sub-themes within these main themes and their correspondence to each other.

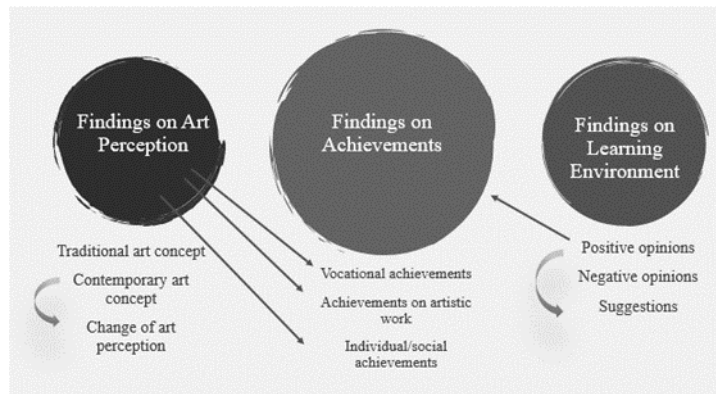


Figure 1. Main Themes and Themes of Research Findings

Findings on Perception of Art

To reveal the impact of comparative art history education through themes on art perception of pre-service teachers, firstly, traditional art perception and contemporary art perception of pre-service teachers were attempted to be identified. Finally, the change of art perception of pre-service teachers was pointed out. Sub-themes and codes on art perception of pre-service teachers are exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2*Findings on art perception of pre-service teachers*

Traditional Art Concept	Contemporary Art Concept	Change in Perception of Art
Esthetic features	No esthetic concern	No requirement of being esthetic
Stylistic design	Mental design	Discovering the philosophical dimension of art
Manual dexterity	Good idea	Discovering the reflections of the issues of the period on art
Limited materials	Unlimited materials	Not limiting art to specific disciplines
More easily comprehended	Occasionally unclear	Prioritizing content over style
Visual analysis/Based on seeing	Philosophical analysis/Based on contemplation	Focusing more on meaning
Passive audience	Included/active audience	Discovering limitlessness of materials in art
Not open for different interpretations	More open to different interpretations	Overcoming prejudice regarding contemporary art
Far from daily life	Closer to daily life	Better understanding/accepting contemporary art
Limited themes	Social focus	Inquiring the nature of art more
Esthetic focus	Object/action/idea	Finding contemporary art more effective
Art object	Non-commercial	Continuing to being more drawn to traditional art
Being commercial	Collectivity	
Single artist/work of art	Wow factor	
Similarity		

As seen in Table 2, on the change of their perception of art, pre-service teachers indicated that they no longer envisioned a work of art to be obliged to be esthetic, that they in fact attached more importance to content than style, and that they discovered the philosophical dimension of art. PST6, for instance, wrote in the final evaluation form of the lesson discussing the theme of the process: "I concluded that form in art is insignificant." (PST6, FEF-3) After the lesson 'New Concepts New Problems in Contemporary Art' dealing with the theme of the subject, PST1 expressed, "I consider art only as an idea now. Conveying our emotions and ideas through art depends on philosophy." (PST1, FEF-4). In the focus group interview, PST5 claimed that traditional art had started to fade away after photography, contemporary art had emerged from the search to find a way to express contemporary problems, and art now required knowing, not seeing. Pre-service teachers also stated that they no longer limited art to certain disciplines, such as painting and sculpting. They had overcome their prejudices against contemporary art previously, and in some cases, adopted it even more. PST6 admitted disliking contemporary art, as an example, enjoying the orientalist works in the Pera Museum but not viewing the pieces exhibited downstairs within the scope of Istanbul Biennial, deeming them "trash". After this course, she started liking contemporary art as she got to understand it. PST3 explained that she already fancied contemporary art before the course, but she liked and understood it even more afterwards. She also elaborated that we are required to understand the contemporary art dealing with today's problems but that it is, on the contrary, usually disliked and excluded. While most of the pre-service teachers indicated that they considered contemporary art more effective concerning artistic expression, one explained that she still felt herself more drawn to traditional art. The pre-service teachers came to a consensus about discovering the limitlessness of materials in art. Some stated that they started to question the nature of art more (what we consider art, for which reasons).

Findings on Achievements

Vocational achievements: According to the findings of this research, the course created a vocational achievement graph (vocational experience – determining vocational goals – developing ideas for vocational activities) progressing by benefiting from one another (Figure 2).

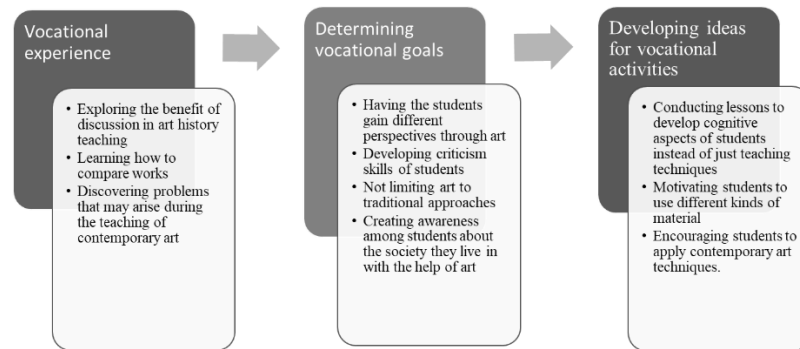


Figure 2. Findings on Vocational Achievements

Pre-service teachers pointed out that the course provided achievements in terms of having vocational experiences, such as exploring the benefit of discussion in art history teaching, learning how to compare works and discovering problems that may arise during the teaching of contemporary art. For example, PST4 wrote in the final evaluation form, “I learned how to explain the differences between two works” (PST4, FEF-1). Similarly, PST5 claimed that she could conduct her lesson comparatively (PST5, FEF-1).

After this vocational experience, pre-service teachers determined some vocational goals, such as having the students gain different perspectives through art, developing criticism skills of students, understanding art beyond traditional approaches, and creating awareness among students about the society they live in with the help of art. PST6 expressed during the focus group interview that she would like to increase her students’ awareness by drawing their attention to social issues through contemporary art, for example, by discussing works of feminist art, to create awareness about gender equality. PST1 wrote in the final evaluation form, “I believe that new generations need to become philosophically aware of the environment through the contemporary art approach” (PST1, FEF-5). PST2 underlined in the final evaluation form (FEF-5) that traditional art always takes precedence; however, that this course was effective in terms of providing students the view of different perspectives and techniques that exist in art.

Pre-service teachers expressed that the course is helpful in terms of developing ideas for vocational activities. PST2 indicated during the focus group interview that contemporary art approaches inspired him in motivating untalented students to transform their ideas into art by using different kinds of material. PST4 mentioned she agreed with PST2 and also explained that she could very well imagine teaching

students lacking the talent to express their ideas in different ways and that she wants to conduct lessons to develop the cognitive aspects of students instead of just teaching techniques. She also stated she would not limit her students to traditional materials and would encourage them to apply any material freely. In this sense, the course process provided pre-service teachers ideas for vocational activities, such as 'conducting activities not only based on manual dexterity/talent, encouraging students to apply different materials and contemporary art techniques.'

Artistic achievements: The impact of contemporary art course on the artistic improvement of pre-service teachers was attempted to be determined and findings are exhibited in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Findings on Artistic Achievements

As seen in Figure 3, several pre-service teachers consider producing works with esthetic concern, not as an imperative; want to practice problem-focused conceptual works –especially focusing on the problems of the society they live in. For example, PST5 stated in the focus group interview that she placed more importance on creating a good idea now than creating an esthetic work of art. She added that she would love to create contemporary works but could not dare to, as she is afraid of not being understood. On the same issue, PST4 explained how she liked the construction and expression of Ipek Duben's *Ask Kitabı* (*Love Book*) and installation art, and that she is open for trying out this type of works, but that she still prefers the traditional approach and her art perception had not changed much.

According to research findings, some pre-service teachers claimed to have discovered the possibility to apply various materials. For instance, in the focus group interview, PST1 pointed out she had discovered there were no limitations in material

selection, she desired to create contemporary works, and applying untraditional material rendered the creation even more effective. Again, PST2 expressed in the final evaluation form of the lesson 'Change of Material in Contemporary Art: Limitlessness of Material.' All in all, we grew up with the traditional art culture, we were taught that works created merely with materials, such as canvas, brush and paper, were considered works of art. However, people demand alternatives now. Materials other than a canvas can richly reinforce meaning" (PST2, FEF-2). There were pre-service teachers likewise emphasizing their desire to apply alternative techniques in their artistic works. Some pre-service teachers revealed their aspiration to utilize technology more and create interdisciplinary/collective works similar to the ones created based on the cooperation of technology and art they had seen during the last lesson. PST2 stated in the focus group interview that after the examples from the presentation Identity Politics and Art, he had started to question the impact of West on our art and that he wishes to create authentic works. The desire to create interactive works was among the presented views as well.

Individual/social achievements: The findings on these achievements were sorted under the sub-themes: individual skills, philosophical inquiry, self-knowledge and social sensitivity (Figure 4).

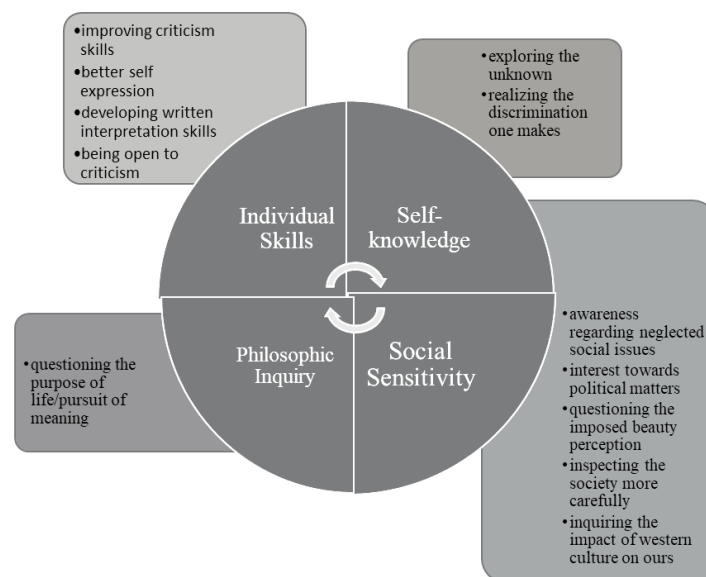


Figure 4. Findings on Individual/Social Achievements

As seen in Figure 4, achievements like improving criticism skills, better self-expression, developing written interpretation skills, being open to criticism were associated with the sub-theme 'individual skills'. The sub-theme 'self-knowledge' was linked with exploring the unknown and realizing the discrimination one makes. PST5 candidly explained during an interview related to this matter, expressing she had

realized the discriminations she makes following the examples and discussions in the lesson.

The noteworthy sub-theme of social sensitivity was associated with inspecting the society more carefully, awareness regarding neglected social issues, inquiring the impact of western culture on ours, interest towards political matters and questioning the imposed beauty perception. In the focus group interview, PST3 stated exemplifying Orlan's performance that now she questioned the beauty perception imposed using various media and abandoned the pursuit of outer beauty. After the examples on the subject Identity Politics and Art, PST2 mentioned he started to question the impact of the West on our culture and became aware of the discriminations he failed to notice experienced not necessarily in his environment but in other countries. He also added that he started to pay more attention to political issues.

Findings display that when pre-service teachers interpret contemporary art works, they, in fact, analyze the social context of the work, making a social criticism of the era they live in. PST2, for example, wrote in the activity form regarding Barbara Kruger's work *I Shop Therefore I am*: "In my opinion, it explains the consumption frenzy the capitalist system imposes on us. When I look around, I see people trying to exist, not with their personalities, but with brands" (PST2, AF-5). Expressing her admiration for the works of Guerilla Girls, PST1 claimed women should not be regarded as sexual objects as in the orientalist paintings of Ingres; however, woman body has been and still is constantly exploited (PST1, AF-5) PST3 stated that examples of feminist art increased her awareness, made her realize the things imposed on women (she used the expression 'we' in the form), which they unconsciously accept. Pre-service teachers pointed out that works of contemporary art dealing with social matters made them inspect the society they live in more carefully and created awareness towards disregarded social issues. Finally, the sub-theme philosophical inquiry was associated with questioning the purpose of life/pursuit of meaning. Regarding this issue, PST3 expressed the process also affected her individually, that she started to pursue meaning, question life more.

Findings on the Learning Environment

Pre-service teachers were asked to evaluate this learning environment in the interview. The findings of the interview are summarized in Figure 5.

Positive Features	Negative Features	Suggestions
Active student	Shortage of time	Reading assignments
Free expression environment	Shortage of videos	Watch more videos
Comparison approach	Difficulty of writing	Weekly discussion groups
Thinking by writing		Contemporary art project
Learning different ideas by discussing		
Utilization of audio-visual materials		

Figure 5. Findings on the Learning Environment

As seen in Figure 5, all pre-service teachers were active throughout the lesson, the comparison technique, and they expressed their moods as positive. They regarded the discussion environment as a positive feature as well, stating that learning new ideas during the discussions improved them. PST5, for example, wrote in the final evaluation form: "Everything seems clearer when things are discussed and compared. It is a healthier method of truly comprehending something. Moreover, comparisons help me defend my ideas, entrench my views and knowledge" (PST5, FEF-2).

The focus group interview revealed different opinions on written interpretations. PST3 claimed it was challenging to write in a limited amount of time, PST6 expressed that thinking by writing contributed to the process, PST1 stated interpretation and writing skills are improved by writing and even provides preparation for art criticism course. PST2, on the other hand, pointed out the need to engage more in discussions instead of writing.

One of the highlighted aspects in the group interview was the videos about the artworks. Pre-service teachers appreciated watching videos, including visuals and comments of the works, however, considered the number of videos to be insufficient. PST4 and PST6 claimed watching videos on performances and similar works would be beneficial to understand this type of work. The negative aspects of the learning environment, according to the pre-service teachers, were: insufficient time, the difficulty of writing and insufficient quantity of videos.

To make the course more efficient pre-service teachers suggested the following items: reading assignments as homework within the scope of the course (especially as a solution for insufficient time), increasing the quantity of videos, organizing proper discussions in the forms of weekly debates. In addition, to understand contemporary art better, creating a project with contemporary art methods within the scope of the course was suggested.

Discussion and Conclusion

Contemporary art's nature, in general, makes it hard to make absolute definitions as well as to reach full understandings. This has negative effects on teaching and

learning in art education as well. Cahan and Kocur (2011, p. 9) emphasize that many teachers refrain from, including contemporary art in their lessons due to their discontentedness of their own lack of knowledge in the field. In this sense, it is a major problem today that contemporary art, to a greater extent, is not sufficiently appreciated, especially in institutions of preservice art education.

Given this necessity and the problem in question, the 5-week period dealing with post-1960s art of the contemporary art course was rearranged through processes informed by action research. Focus group interview and document analysis were conducted, to assess the impact of the process on the pre-service teachers' art perception, vocational, individual/social development, and to determine the views of the pre-service teachers about this learning environment. Based on that there is no similar research on this issue, results obtained via focus group interview, activity sheets and final evaluation forms were tried to be discussed within the context of the targets of postmodern art education.

Within the scope of this research, comparative art history based on certain themes was taught. The themes allowed discussing different art approaches concerning similarity/differences by pointing out the differences between the traditional art works and contemporary art works created with alternative approaches. Consequently, a course environment in which the student is more active, encouraged to question and criticize was created as recommended (Cetin, 2001; Gultekin, 2009; Kırısoglu, 2009, Özsoy & Alakus, 2017). While discussing the changing nature of art, pre-service teachers also conducted socio-cultural readings of contemporary art pieces. This is one of the most fundamental objectives postmodern art education expects from learning environments. As Mamur (2014) indicates, it is aimed to explore the relationship of images with cultural and social issues, develop personal, political and cultural awareness by applying questioning methods in art education. Contemporary artists, who adopt a critical approach towards social issues, and scrutinize the social codes, produce works that reveal the hidden messages behind the visuals of the world we live in. The attempts to interpret these works within the scope of the lesson can be called 'visual culture education', since, with the help of these works, the images created by media matters about daily life, such as the influence of media on society, consumption culture and mass culture, are discussed. This discussion environment is parallel with the goals of critical pedagogy as well. According to this approach, the educator should focus on the learner's talent and ask him/her questions instead of giving information (Mayo, 2012, p. 108) to create his/her own meaning.

In the research process, comparison through themes and discussion-based approach was applied as an alternative. As seen in the findings, all pre-service teachers appreciated being active throughout the course, participating in the comparison technique, and having a free expression environment. Similarly, Herrmann (2005, p. 46) criticizes teacher-focused artwork activities to inhibit students from developing their own opinions and recommends making art education more meaningful for students. Art education should not place students as passive receivers of pre-produced meanings but, indeed, remind them they are original meaning creators, interpreters

(Gude, 2007, p. 13). This is only possible by reflecting the multi-perspective of postmodernism on art education.

According to the findings, not only the desired level of achievements of vocational and artistic developments of pre-service teachers was reached but also achievements that support their individual and social development were witnessed. These achievements are in compliance with the aims of Visual Culture, Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Feminist Theory, Multiculturality and Social Justice, Social Constructivism. These findings suggest that the learning environment created within the scope of this study is in harmony with the general aura of postmodern art education.

Research findings also show that there are many achievements regarding the artistic applications of pre-service teachers. Opinions of pre-service teachers, such as 'not requiring esthetic forms in artistic works, exploring different material possibilities, creating idea-oriented, conceptual, technological, interdisciplinary/collective and interactive works involving the problems of the society, desiring to apply alternative techniques of contemporary art' reflect the nature of contemporary art. This is evidence that pre-service teachers have understood and adopted the nature of contemporary art and that they have realized the new statement of art provides new ways of expression for artistic work. Similarly, contemporary art education methods focus more on the idea than on esthetic objects. Herrmann (2005, p. 46) states that we need to create a learning environment that helps students to understand that art is about not only transforming material and using it creatively, but also transforming and restructuring ideas. In this regard, it is emphasized that the wide content of contemporary art should be integrated into education environments in our country through concepts like current art, conceptual art, and postmodern art (Gumgum, 2016; Calkus, 2015; Azilhoglu, 2011; Kasioglu 2009; Heptunali, 2007; Susoy Simsek; 2006). For example, Susoy Simsek (2006, p. 81) concluded in her research that the freedom provided by conceptual art in an individual's art perspective and works contributes to the person to be more original, creative, questioning and to gain existence. Kasioglu (2009, p. 105) states in his thesis that according to the interviews he conducted with art educators, there is a consensus on art not merely being about manual dexterity, conceptual art being extremely important within art education in terms of providing the possibility to create art with unusual techniques and materials, and students being able to hugely benefit from conceptual art. As is seen, an effective education based on analyzing and interpreting current art works can develop the skills of future art educators (Gumgum, 2016, p. 80), consequently, supporting the improvement of their artistic perception and skills, as well as professional lives.

The opinions of pre-service teachers for vocational activities, such as 'conducting activities not only based on manual dexterity/talent, encouraging students to apply different materials and contemporary art techniques', indicate their wish to reflect perspectives of contemporary art to their vocational lives. This situation is parallel to the change of their art perception. Defining art from such a wide perspective has had effects on their targets regarding their artistic practices and professional lives. The most positive change in pre-service teachers' art perception can be summarized as

overcoming their prejudices and welcoming contemporary art more in their understanding of art.

The pre-service teachers appreciated being able to make comparisons/discussions in a free environment and benefited from different visual, auditory, and audiovisual materials throughout the course. Negative aspects of the learning environment, according to the pre-service teachers, were: insufficient course hours, general difficulties in written expression, and time limitations on watching more videos during lessons. Emphasis on the designated time for contemporary art being insufficient is presented in other research as well (Bulut, 2014; Calkus, 2015; Bulut Kılıç & Altıntaş, 2016; Coskun Onan, 2016). It is pointed out that one semester is not enough to fulfill a course with such wide content (Bulut Kılıç & Altıntaş, 2016, p. 56). The course takes up 14 weeks in the academic calendar. Considering the intense content of other subjects and mid-term exams, five weeks of the course were included in the research process based on five themes. Although the number of weeks was enough in terms of focusing on five themes about traditional/contemporary distinction, occasionally, the duration of the lesson was insufficient for applying multiple activities like writing, viewing/listening /watching visual, auditory, audiovisual materials, reading, and discussing. Writing and discussing issues require particularly more time, and some pre-service teachers, who are not fond of writing, did not appreciate spending a significant amount of time on such activity. On the other hand, research on the issue claim that lessons contributing to the appreciation of contemporary art and encouraging students to read, write, discuss are required (Bulut, 2014; Calkus 2015). Similar views highlight that art education courses abroad apply writing activities and results, in general, are positive. For example, Mamur (2014) notes that the lesson 'Diversity, Visual Culture and Pedagogy', which she examined as part of her research she conducted in the US, included writing activities, and the students were more active during the lesson since they were required to express their views on paper. It is concluded that writing activities are necessary for contemporary art courses. Their duration and practical hours (e.g., homework and project) should, however, be arranged according to the students' needs.

Pre-service teachers participating in the research process also suggested conducting art making projects as part of the course. Other research on this subject support these suggestions by claiming that, despite its heavily theoretical nature, the contemporary art course can be more useful through application projects and a separate art making course for contemporary art should be included in the curriculum (Heptunali, 2007; Bulut, 2014; Coskun Onan, 2016; Coskun Onan, 2017). In addition, Sungurtekin and Bilhan (2017) concluded in their study, which was conducted as an interdisciplinary art education application involving music, dance/motion, and painting, pre-service teachers gained new perspectives and knowledge about contemporary art learned going beyond the traditional in art. Gunes (2015), in a similar study, claimed that an education process applying multidisciplinary art education methods was more effective than the direct instruction model. Bulut Kılıç and Altıntaş (2016) assert that an art making course comprising practices based on metaphoric thinking in contemporary art and with content, including contemporary art

contributes to visual arts teachers' art education success concerning theoretical and practical dimensions. As all the above-mentioned research results indicate, incorporating contemporary art practices into this course will create a positive outcome.

Suggestions

In 2018, the duration of the contemporary art course in the weekly programs of art education departments in Turkey has been reduced from three hours to two hours. This contradicts with our findings in our study, which recommends making the course hours even more. From this perspective, the suggestions to extend the lesson from one semester to two are quite sensible. Although the extension seems to be impossible right now, it is recommended to learn through themes for the efficient use of the available time in the new program.

Another suggestion for efficient use of the limited course hours is to devise assignments that include reading and writing. It is also suggested that activities, such as watching certain videos and virtual museum visits, can be given as part of such assignments. Based on experience from the research process, it is safe to say that the comparison method makes it possible to identify old and new, traditional and contemporary, all at once side by side, unlike the linear logic of the traditional chronological approach. It is recommended to apply the comparison method since it places the students in an active position. The findings of our research also suggest including projects requiring practical work in contemporary art courses for better learning is essential.

The limited number of research dealing with teaching contemporary art course indicates a serious need for research in this field. Such research should be conducted, especially about creating different learning environments regarding the teaching of post-1960s postmodern art approaches. It is recommended that these studies would not be merely for university level education, but also primary and secondary schools.

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Çağdaş Sanatı Okumak: Temalar Yoluyla Karşılaştırmalı Sanat Tarihi Öğretimi

Atıf:

- Bolat, K. E. (2021). Reading contemporary art: Comparative art history education through themes. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 92, 227-252, DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2021.92.12

Özet

Problem Durumu: Görsel sanatlar öğretmeni yetiştiren kurumların lisans programında yer alan Çağdaş Sanat dersinde, belirli bir kronolojik çizgide ilerlemeyen, belirli biçimsel üsluplar altında sınıflandırılmayan ve kendinden önceki geleneksel sanat disiplinleri gibi kesin çizgilerle tanımlanamayan çağdaş sanat yaklaşımlarını geleneksel sanat tarihi öğretimi bakışıyla ve kronolojik bir yaklaşımla ele almak çağdaş sanatın anlaşılmasında sorunlar yaratabilmekte hatta çağdaş sanata dair ön yargılar oluşturabilmektedir. Nitel araştırma yaklaşımlarından biri olan eylem araştırmaları, eğitimde karşılaşılan bu tür problemlerin bilimsel bir yaklaşım ile çözümüne yönelik uygulamaları içermektedir. Bu çalışmada da çağdaş sanat öğretimine ilişkin alternatif bir öğretim ortamı geliştirmek amacıyla bir eylem araştırması gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Araştırmada, Çağdaş Sanat dersinin 1960 sonrası alternatif sanat yaklaşımlarını konu alan 5 haftalık süreci, geleneksel teknikle üretilmiş sanat eserleri ile bu eserlerin ayırımına işaret eden beş tema (mekân, malzeme, süreç, konu, teknik) çerçevesinde yeniden düzenlenmiştir. Temalar yoluyla karşılaştırmalı sanat tarihi öğretimine dayalı bu öğrenme ortamının öğretmen adaylarının sanat algısında, mesleki, bireysel/toplumsal gelişimlerinde nasıl bir değişim yarattığının ortaya konması ve Çağdaş Sanat dersinin geliştirilmesine ilişkin öneriler getirilmesi bu araştırmada amaçlamaktadır.

Araştırmanın Yöntemi: Eylem araştırması, çağdaş sanat dersinin yeniden yapılandırılması ve oluşturulan yeni öğrenme ortamının etkisinin değerlendirilerek geliştirilmesi bağlamında çalışmanın amacına en uygun yöntem olarak tercih edilmiştir. Çalışma grubunu belirlerken ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Odak öğretmen adaylarının seçimi için esas alınan ölçütler ise; derse ilgileri, katılımları, kendini ifade etme becerileri ve araştırmaya gönüllü katılım olarak belirlenmiştir. Buna göre araştırmacının yürüttüğü SAN 308 kodlu Çağdaş Sanat dersini alan ve Anadolu Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Eğitimi Bölümü'nde eğitim gören 5 kız ve 1 erkek öğretmen adayından oluşan bir çalışma grubu oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmanın verileri, ders kapsamında gerçekleştirilen etkinliklere ilişkin yazılı formlar (etkinlik formları, son değerlendirme formları) ve odak grup görüşmesi yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Araştırmada uygulanmak üzere 6 tane etkinlik formu ve 5 tane son değerlendirme formu geliştirilmiştir. Yapılan odak grup görüşmesi için ise yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları hazırlanmıştır. 6 açık uçlu sorudan oluşan görüşme formu sanat eğitimi alanında uzman iki kişi tarafından incelenerek sorulara son biçimi verilmiştir. Araştırmada elde edilen veriler betimsel analiz yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Araştırmanın kavramsal çerçevesinden, görüşme ve doküman analizlerinde yer alan verilerden hareket edilerek veri analizi için bir çerçeve oluşturulmuş ve bu çerçeve bağlamında başlıklar ve bu başlıklara ilişkin temalar belirlenmiştir. Elde edilen veriler bu temalar bağlamında düzenlenerek yorumlanmıştır. Verilerin analizi sürecinde elde edilen bulgular güvenilirliği arttırmak amacıyla başka bir alan uzmanı tarafından da kodlanmış ve yapılan kodlamalar karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu karşılaştırmalar sırasında gerekli düzenlemeler yapılarak görüş birliğine ulaşılmıştır.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Ders sürecinin öğretmen adaylarının sanat algısında yarattığı değişime ilişkin, öğretmen adayları artık bir sanat eserinin estetik olmasını şart görmediklerini hatta içeriği biçimsellikten daha fazla önemsediklerini bu anlamda sanatın felsefi boyutunu keşfettiklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Öğretmen adayları, sanat tarihi öğretiminde tartışma etkinliğinin yararını keşfetme, eser karşılaştırmayı öğrenme ve çağdaş sanat öğretiminde karşılaşılabilecek sorunları keşfetme gibi mesleki deneyim yaşama bağlamında dersin kazanımlar sağladığını da ifade etmişlerdir. Öğretmen adaylarının yaşadıkları bu mesleki deneyimden bazı mesleki hedeflere ulaştıkları ve bu hedeflerin de mesleki uygulamalara dönük fikir geliştirme anlamında katkı sağladığı görülmüştür. Sanatsal kazanımlar bağlamında ise; öğretmen adaylarından bazıları sorunsal odaklı kavramsal çalışmalar isteği duyduklarını hatta özellikle yaşadığı toplumdaki sorunsallara yönelik kavramsal çalışmalar yapmak istediklerini, farklı malzemelerin olanaklarını keşfettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Ders

ortamının öğretmen adaylarının bireysel/toplumsal gelişimlerine etkisi bağlamında, öğretmen adaylarının eleştirebilme yeteneğinin gelişmesi, kendini daha iyi ifade edebilmesi, yazılı yorum yeteneğinin gelişmesi ve eleştiriye açık olma gibi kazanımları bireysel beceriler alt temasıyla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Kendini tanıma alt teması ise bilmediklerini keşfetme ve kendi yaptığı ayrımcılığın farkına varma ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Araştırmada öne çıkan toplumsal duyarlılık alt teması ise yaşadığı topluma daha dikkatli bakma, göz ardı edilen toplumsal sorunlara dair farkındalık, Batı kültürünün kültürümüze etkisini sorgulama, politik konulara ilgi ve dayatılan güzellik algısını sorgulama ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Son olarak, felsefi sorgulama alt teması ise; hayat amacını sorgulama/anlam arayışı ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Öğretmen adaylarıyla yapılan görüşmede öğretmen adaylarının hepsi ders sürecinde aktif olmalarını, karşılaştırma tekniğini ve özgür bir ifade ortamının olmasını olumlu olarak nitelendirmişlerdir. Öğrenme ortamının öğretmen adaylarınca olumsuz bulunan durumları ise; sürenin yetersiz olması, yazı yazmanın zorluğu ve videoların az sayıda olması olarak ifade edilmiştir. Dersin daha etkin hale getirilmesi anlamında ders sürecinde okuma ödevleri verilmesi (özellikle süre yetersizliğine ek bir çözüm olarak sunulmuştur) ve videoların artırılması öğretmen adayları tarafından önerilmiştir. Ayrıca öğretmen adayları çağdaş sanat uygulamalarına dayalı bir projenin ders kapsamında gerçekleştirilmesini de önermişlerdir.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Öneriler: Araştırmada sürecinde alternatif bir yöntem olarak tematik- karşılaştırma esasına dayalı bir yaklaşım çağdaş sanat dersi sürecinde uygulanmış ve bulgulara görüldüğü üzere öğretmen adaylarının hepsi bu ders sürecinde aktif olmalarını, karşılaştırma tekniğini ve özgür bir ifade ortamının olmasını olumlu olarak nitelendirmişlerdir. Ayrıca öğretmen adaylarının, 'sanat yoluyla öğrencilere farklı bakış açıları kazandırma, öğrencilerin eleştiri yeteneğini geliştirme, sanatı geleneksel yaklaşımlarla sınırlamama ve sanat yoluyla öğrencilere yaşadığı toplumun sorunlarına dair farkındalık kazandırma' şeklinde mesleki hedefler belirlemeleri ise postmodern sanat eğitiminin amaçlarını mesleki anlamda da içselleştirdiklerini göstermektedir. Araştırma bulguları, öğretmen adaylarının sanatsal uygulamalarına dönük kazanımlarının da olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu durum, öğretmen adaylarının çağdaş sanatın doğasını kavradıklarını, benimsediklerini ve sanata getirdiği yeni önermeleri, kendi sanatsal çalışmaları için yeni ifade olanakları olarak gördüklerini göstermektedir. Öğretmen adaylarının mesleki, sanatsal gelişimlerinin yanı sıra bireysel ve toplumsal gelişimlerini de destekleyen kazanımlar sağlanmıştır ve bu kazanımlar, postmodern sanat eğitiminin temellendiği Görsel Kültür, Eleştirel Kuram, Eleştirel Pedagoji, Feminist Kuram, Çok Kültürlülük ve Sosyal Adalet, Sosyal Yeniden Yapılandırma yaklaşımlarının amaçlarıyla uyum sağlamaktadır.

2018 yılında Resim-İş Öğretmenliği Lisans Programlarında yapılan güncelleme ile Çağdaş Sanat dersinin saati 3 saatten 2 saate düşürülmüştür. Ders sürecinde temalar yoluyla öğretim yaklaşımının uygulanması sürenin verimli kullanılması açısından bu anlamda önerilmektedir. Çağdaş sanatın doğasını yansıtan temel noktalar tema olarak belirlenerek ders süreci yapılandırılabilir. Ders süresini verimli kullanmaya yönelik bir diğer öneri ise faydalı olduğu düşünülen eleştiri yazılarını okuma ve yazılı yorum

yapma etkinliklerinin ödev şeklinde verilmesidir. Araştırmada öğretmen adaylarının öneri olarak vurguladığı diğer bir durum ise görsel-işitsel materyallerin daha da yoğun kullanılmasıdır. Çağdaş sanat dersine ilişkin önemli diğer bir nokta ise dersin salt teori ile sınırlı kalmasıdır. Kapsamlı Sanat Eğitimi, Bütüncül Sanat Eğitimi, 2. Nesil Disipline Dayalı Sanat Eğitimi gibi günümüz sanat eğitimi yaklaşımları, teori ve uygulamanın bir arada olmasını önermektedir. Bu anlamda Çağdaş Sanat dersinde uygulama projelerine yer verilmesinin olumlu sonuçlar yaratacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Postmodernizm, sanat eğitimi, postmodern sanat, çağdaş sanat öğretimi.